

Message Text

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ORIGIN NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 R

66011

DRAFTED BY S/S:JPMOFFAT

APPROVED BY S/S:MOFFAT

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P 201703Z FEB 76 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 040935 TOSEC 040127

NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT

TUNIS 1187 ACTION SECSTATE 19 FEB 76

QUOTE

S E C R E T TUNIS 1187

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DEPT PLEASE PASS CAIRO

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS EG

SUBJ: EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY'S MEETING
WITH TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI

REF : (A) STATE 31065, (B) STATE 24935, (C) STATE 24958,
(D) STATE 24957, (E) TUNIS 747

1. I INFORMED FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI PRIVATELY ON
FEBRUARY 19 THAT FAHMY HAD CONVEYED TO US, THROUGH
AMBASSADOR EILTS, CHATTI'S CONCERNS REGARDING THREATS
POSED BY LIZYA AND ALLERIA, AS WELL AS CHATTI'S
REQUEST THAT EGYPTIANS RELAY TO US THIS CONCERN. I
ALSO ACQUAINTED CHATTI WITH OUR REPLY TO FAHMY, INDICATING
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INTER ALIA THAT WE ARE PRTPOSING AN INCREASE IN OUR LEVEL

OF FMS CREDITS TO TUNISIA AND THAT REGULAR NAVAL VISITS CONTINUE. I VOLUNTEERED THAT THESE VISITS ARE DESIGNED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, TO DEMONSTRATE USG INTEREST IN TUNISIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY.

2. CHATTI SAID THAT IT WAS NOT HE WHO PROPOSED THAT THE EGYPTIANS RAISE TUNISIAN CONCERNS WITH US, BUT RATHER PRESIDENT SADAT. OBVIOUSLY, CHATTI CONTINUED, TUNISIA IS IN CLOSE AND CONTINUOUS TOUCH WITH THE USG AND NEEDS NO INTERMEDIARY. WHAT HAPPENED WAS THAT DURING A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SADAT, ATTENDED BY FAHMY, CHATTI HAD EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN DEVELOPING A NORTH AFRICAN "STRATEGY" BASED ON STRONG LINKS BETWEEN TUNISIA AND EGYPT AS A MEANS OF ENCOUNTERING LIBYA AND ALGERIA. "SYNCHRONIZATION" OF THIS STRATEGY, SAID CHATTI, SHOULD ALSO INCLUDE MOROCCO AS THE WESTERN ANCHOR. AT THIS POINT, ACCORDING TO CHATTI, SADAT REFERRED TO CLOSE US/EGYPTIAN RELATIONS AND PROPOSED THAT USG SHOULD DO MORE TO SUPPORT TUNISIA AND STRENGTHEN THIS STRATEGY OF "SYNCHRONIZATION." HE THEREUPON TURNED TO FAHMY AND INSTRUCTED HIM TO SEE AMBASSADOR EILTS FOR PURPOSE OF URGING USG TO DO MORE FOR TUNISIA.

3. CHATTI SMILED AT EGYPTIAN VERSION OF WHAT HAPPENED AND COMMENTED THAT WASHINGTON MUST HAVE BEEN "ASTONISHED" AT SUGGESTION THAT TUNISIA WOULD GO THROUGH EGYPT TO GET TO WASHINGTON. AGAIN, HE REPEATED THAT IF GOT HAD ANYTHING TO TELL US, THEY WOULD DO SO DIRECTLY.

4. HAVING SAID THE FOREGOING, CHATTI TOOK ADVANTAGE OF OUR PRIVATE MEETING TO MAKE A PITCH FOR INCREASED US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO TUNISIA. HE SAID THAT OVER YEAR AGO, WHEN TUNISIA HAD PRESENTED USG WITH REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN U.S. MILITARY EQUIPMENT, THREAT TO TUNISIA HAD ESSENTIALLY BEEN FROM DIRECTION OF LIBYA. TUNISIA HAD FELT THAT WHILE THIS THREAT REAL, IT SOMEWHAT MITIGATED BY ALGERIA OPPOSITION TO LIBYA -- WHICH SERVED SOMEWHAT AS A RESTRAINT ON QADHAFI. NOW, HOWEVER, WITH BOUMEDIENNE AND QADHAFI COLLABORATING, ANY SUCH RESTRAINT ON LIBYA IS REMOVED, AND THE LIBYAN THREAT BECOMES MORE ACUTE. CHATTI SAID THAT, FUNDAMENTALLY, TUNISIA DOES NOT EXPECT ALGERIA TO CROSS TUNISIAN BORDER. INSTEAD, BOUMEDIENNE MIGHT GIVE

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QADHAFI CARTE BLANCHE TO MAKE TROUBLE FOR TUNISIA.

5. COMMENT: AS DEPARTMENT KNOWS, TUNISIANS CONTINUE TO BE AMBIVALENT REGARDING IMPROVING TUNISIA'S MILITARY POSTURE. THEY WANT MORE OF A MILITARY DETERENT BUT THEY

BOTH HESITATE TO DIVERT LIMITED RESOURCES FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ARE UNEASY WITH THE THOUGHT THAT BUILDING

UP THEIR ARMY MEANS "TAKING IT OUT OF THE CASERNES". BEFORE
CONSIDERING INCREASING LEVEL OF FMS CREDITS FURTHER, IN
RESPONSE TO CHATTI'S REQUEST, I PROPOEE WE WAIT TO SEE
WHAT TUNISIANS DO WITH \$15 MILLION FMS CREDIT WE EXPECT
TO GIVE THEM THIS FISCAL 1976.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TOSEC, MILITARY ASSISTANCE, CAT-B, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE040935
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JPMOFFAT
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: N760002-0151
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 2
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760229/aaaaayya.tel
Line Count: 123
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 76 STATE 31065, 76 STATE 24935, 76 STATE 24958
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <12 OCT 2004 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: LOCK1
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY'S MEETING WITH TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI
TAGS: PFOR, MASS, TS, EG, LY, AG, (CHATTI, HABIB), (FAHMY, ISMAIL)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006